

THE MIKADO

NODA REPORT

On Saturday 24th February 2007, I was privileged to be invited to review Reading Operatic Society's latest production 'The Mikado'. In all the years I have been a NODA Rep' and the many productions of 'The Mikado' I have witnessed, this was without doubt the finest performance of this show that I have ever seen. It had been superbly cast with principals who not only looked the part but who had developed superb characterisations. Its staging was of the best and when one is presented with a mens chorus of 20 full-blooded males and the same number of delightful ladies you know you are in for a cracking nights entertainment.

Keith Lawrence - (THE MIKADO OF JAPAN) - This character is a truly regal and terrifying person who -'From Every Kind of Man Obedience He Expects' and this we had on Keith's entrance in the second act who appeared in a most magnificent costume and exceptional make-up and one could understand why people shrank from him. This was an outstanding performance with a bass voice that excelled in the number 'More Humane Mikado'.

Simon Huteon - (NANKI-POO) - This young man is a find by Reading Operatic and who presented a first class tenor voice, grabbing the audience on his first entry with the number 'A Wandering Minstrel I'. His characterisation was just right with good interplay between himself, Katisha and Yum Yum. Facial expressions, movement and diction could not be faulted - an excellent performance.

Iain Whittaker - (KO-KO) - Iain excels in Gilbert & Sullivan comedy roles, of which I have seen him play many. He has just the right quality in his singing and speaking voice which fits these characters like a glove. His facial expressions are a joy to behold and all of these attributes came to the fore in his presentation of Ko-Ko showing bewilderment and fright but at the same time being able to wriggle out of awkward situations. His singing of 'I've Got a Little List' with topical references was great and his singing of 'Tit Willow' brought out all the pathos of this number.

Andrew Phillips - (POOH-BAH) - This is a lovely character to play, he is venal, hypocritical, and an unutterable snob -'I Can't Help It, I Was Born Sneering' - Andrew was excellent in this part presenting with aplomb all of Pooh-Bah's characteristics. Movement, facial expressions and delivery were all spot-on coupled with an excellent bass-baritone voice.

Jeff Trim - (PISH-TUSH) - This character is a noble lord, no more, no less and Jeff could not have played this part better and who comes into his own with his number 'Our Great Mikado' and lending his excellent tenor voice to the Madrigal in the second act. Here we had good, controlled movement and facial expressions.

Jenni Simmonds - (YUM-YUM)

Alice Griffiths - (PITTI-SING)

Jenny Gumbrell - (PEEP-BO) - These three young ladies appeared on stage, 'Filled To The Brim With Girlish Glee' with all three giving first-class performances. Singing was superb and in particular 'Yum-Yum's' 'The Sun Whose Rays' which was sung with great feeling and control. All three ladies moved with typical Japanese movement which was maintained throughout and their dance movements were precise and controlled - A trio of a very high order.

Maggie Preston - (KATISHA) - This character is very often over-played turning her into a spiteful and obnoxious person when in fact she should be played as a middle-aged noblewoman, bitter with frustration but regal in manner and Maggie got the characterisation absolutely right. Her singing was a joy to listen too and her interplay with the chorus, the Mikado and Ko-Ko could not have been presented better.

Chorus of Nobles, Girls, Coolies & Guards - And what a chorus! You would have to go a long way in this day and age to find a chorus of this stature, from the mens opening number 'If You Want To Know Who We Are' to the ladies entry with 'Comes a Train of Little Ladies' one was regaled with precise singing, excellent harmonisation and which filled the Hexagon auditorium with wonderful sounds - The best chorus singing I have heard in a

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Reviewed 22/02/07

Reading Operatic Society presented a quality production directed and choreographed stylishly by Jill Morgan. The supremely high standard of the singing and clarity of diction were a delight throughout. The ladies' chorus charmed with their coquettish demeanour, whilst the men's chorus was the very essence of Japan. The artistic groupings of the ensembles were a visual delight.

All the principals displayed a truly professional expertise and impressed with their fine singing. Simon Hutson (Nanki-Poo) is the possessor of a fine tenor voice which he used to musical effect. His rendering of 'A Wand'ring Minstrel I' was masterly. Jenni Simmonds (Yum-Yum) was the epitome of charm and femininity and sang, danced and acted with poised grace in a truly professional manner. The much-loved trio 'Three Little Maids From School' won well deserved applause, sung by Yum-Yum, Alice Griffiths (Pitti-Sing) and Jenny Gumbrell (Peep-Bo).

Comedy, humour and an endearing twinkle made Iain Wittaker's portrayal of Ko-Ko, the Executioner, a memorable performance. Maggie Preston (Katisha) performed with an imposing authoritative stage presence and Keith Lawrence (The Mikado) used his fine bass voice in a portrayal filled with aplomb.

Andrew Phillips (Pooh-Bah) gave an excellent performance and his good baritone voice was a delight to the ear. Jeff Trim (Pish-Tush) performed with experienced ease. The quartet 'Brightly Dawns Our Wedding Day' was one of the highlights of this excellent production, accompanied with sensitivity by the orchestra under their conductor John Lawes.

Bron Gonnella
Reading Chronicle

long time.

Jill Morgan - (PRODUCER & CHOREOGRAPHER) - As stated earlier, this was one of the finest productions of 'The Mikado' I have seen. Firstly, it had followed the original as Gilbert & Sullivan intended, secondly you had cast some excellent principals and thirdly infused the cast with a joy of performing. Fan work was precise and choreographically it was well served with some superb Japanese dance movements which, all in all, presented a truly wonderful Japanese experience.

John Lawes - (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) - This 20 piece orchestra of first class musicians ensured that Sullivan's music was played correctly with a beautiful balance of instruments and correct tempo's throughout, all under the control of John Lawes who ensured the orchestra was sympathetic to the performers on stage. Both chorus and principals had been well rehearsed in the music with accurate singing and well balanced harmonies.

Stage Manager & Crew - This was a well managed stage throughout with no visible hitches.

Lighting Design & Operation - The lighting design ensured the right atmosphere was generated on stage for both acts. On the night of my visit, lighting cues were well picked up.

Sound - The sound was of a good quality so that every word could be heard, both spoken and sung, all without distortion - Have the Hexagon got it right at last!!!! We shall see.

Scenery - I was impressed with this set of scenery, it was simplistic but effective and helped to give a good Japanese feel to the proceedings.

Costumes & Wigs - The Haslemere Wardrobe excelled themselves with this set of costumes, they looked suitably Japanese and authentic in all detail. They were colourful and looked clean and well fitting. A particular mention of the costumes for both 'Katasha' and the 'Mikado' which had dramatic impact. All wigs fitted well and looked well dressed.

Properties - A well selected group of properties, all in keeping with the production and looking suitably Japanese. A first-class set of fans which looked most effective on stage.

Make-up - The make-up had been well designed ensuring the cast looked suitably Japanese. Character make-up was superb and in particular 'Katisha' and the 'Mikado' which was quite brilliant.

Programme - An excellent programme, well laid out with all the relevant information. It contained interesting graphics and good, clear photographs of the performers.

Front of House - Excellent Front of House staff as usual, and my thanks to John Gibbs, Front of House co-ordinator for his hospitality which was much appreciated.

Thank you for inviting me to review your latest presentation and I look forward to your next production 'Oklahoma' and wish you all success with it.

Henry Hawes - NODA Representative - Area 13